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THE ABBÉ PRÉVOST AND SHAKESPEARE¹

In the seventeenth century the French in general were interested little in the literature or the civilization of England, but strangely enough it was Louis XIV himself who, quite unintentionally, contributed powerfully to change the indifferent attitude of his countrymen. In 1688 he revoked the Edict of Nantes. The annulling of that act of religious toleration brought into being forthwith a sturdy band of Protestant refugees eager enough to become the enthusiastic champions of that England which gave them shelter and welcome. They founded periodicals for which they wrote numerous articles in praise of England. Untiringly they translated, now short passages, now whole books, chosen from among the more or the less important literary works of Great Britain. More and more numerous became that part of the public which was well disposed toward their efforts. Still, for the movement to obtain complete success there was needed the influence of men of greater talents. Finally three men came to the fore, of whom each had particular motives for being glad to sing the praises of the country across the Channel, thereby taking now and again a backhanded fling at France herself. Of these men one was a Swiss Protestant, one a government exile, and the third a monk who had fled from his monastery.

The first, B  at de Muralt, is the author of certain *Lettres sur les Anglois et sur les Fran  ois*, which, although written about 1694 or

¹ It is a pleasure here to express my obligation to one of my former professors at Johns Hopkins University, M. Elie Carcassonne, who, while this study was in preparation, aided me often with keen criticism and enlightening suggestion.

1695, did not appear until 1725. They were much read,¹ and they deserved popularity, but literature held a small place in the esteem of this grave Swiss, and he spoke of it only apologetically.

Voltaire was of very different stuff. In his *Discours sur la tragédie* of 1731,² in the French version of the *Essai sur la poésie épique* of 1733,³ and in the *Lettres philosophiques* of 1734 he gave much space to literature and to English literature especially. Nevertheless even his admiration, keen enough sometimes, was often greatly limited either by professional jealousy or by prejudices due to birth and education.

A third author came to play his part in the movement of ideas from England to France, namely the Abbé Prévost, who about this same time conceived the idea of gaining his livelihood by spreading among the French public a taste for things English.⁴ His success is a proof of the vigor of the movement inaugurated by the French Protestant refugees.⁵ In 1731 appeared Volumes V-VII of the *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, which contains appreciations in general very favorable to English literature. Another novel, *Le Philosophe anglois ou Histoire de monsieur Cléveland*, began to appear during the same year. From 1733 to 1740 the Abbé published his weekly periodical, the *Pour et Contre*,⁶ which was of sufficient importance for Voltaire to seek to obtain in it favorable reviews of his works.⁷ All sorts of subjects of most unequal value lured the facile pen of the indefatigable Abbé, but his principal aim in this magazine was to publish criticism on English literature.⁸

¹ A second edition appeared as early as 1727 at Cologne. Muralt's *Lettres* influenced to some extent Voltaire and also the *Nouvelle Héloïse* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For a treatment of the latter question see my article, "The Sources of Rousseau's *Edouard Bomston*," to appear in *Modern Philology*.

² Printed as the Preface to *Brutus*.

³ Published with special intent to defend the *Henriade*.

⁴ Letter from Marais to President Bouhier, July 11, 1733, quoted by Henri HARRISSE, *L'Abbé Prévost* (Paris, 1896), pp. 212-13.

⁵ By his novels, by his periodical, the *Pour et Contre*, and by his translations of Richardson, Prévost succeeded in gaining a living independent of the pensions frequently given in those days to favored writers.

⁶ Twenty volumes, Didot, Paris, 1733-40. Prévost himself was the author of most of this work, but he did not write Vol. II, p. 83, to the end; Vol. III, pp. 1-48; Vol. XVII, p. 25, to the end; Vol. XVIII entire; Vol. XIX, pp. 25-48. A discussion of this question will appear later.

⁷ HARRISSE, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-14, 252-53, 271-73.

⁸ *PC* (*Pour et Contre*), I, 12; I, 217; VI, 312; IX, 122.

Although Prévost's fame today rightly rests upon his one enduring novel, *Manon Lescaut*, his activity as a popularizer in France of English literature was not without considerable influence upon the literary history of the eighteenth century and is worthy of a separate study. This article will consider the attitude of the Abbé Prévost toward Shakespeare. The subject has already attracted the attention of certain critics who have discussed it briefly in passing. Their conclusions, in sum, are as follows.

"Cet abbé," writes M. Jusserand, "était hérétique dans l'âme; il s'exprime sans respect sur les anciens et sur les règles; et il le fait, ce qui était alors sans exemple, au profit de l'auteur d'*Hamlet*."¹ "Prévost," says Joseph Texte, "forcé de vivre en Angleterre, et d'y gagner sa vie, s'y anglicisa plus qu'aucun autre écrivain du dix-huitième siècle."²

Faguet says: "Prévost est entièrement favorable à Shakespeare. . . . Sa critique est singulièrement juste."³ M. Baldensperger says that "dans le *Pour et Contre*, en 1738, Prévost . . . félicite le poète [Shakespeare]—dont il donnera jusqu'à une biographie circonstanciée—de n'avoir pas connu les Anciens. . . . *Hamlet*—comparé à *Electre*—la *Tempête*, les *Joyeuses Commères*, *Othello*, sont l'objet spécial d'un examen sympathique. . . . Prévost donne à son anglomanie sa libre expression."⁴ M. Schroeder thinks that "Prévost comprend mieux que Voltaire les audacieuses envolées de Shakespeare. . . . Par l'intelligence qu'il a eue de la plupart des beautés shakespeariennes, Prévost a singulièrement devancé les Français de son temps."⁵ It has thus become customary to remark that, while Voltaire shows only a rather narrow and timid admiration for Shakespeare, Prévost sets scarcely any limit to his enthusiasm and carries it even to the extreme of a veritable Anglomania. However, M. Schroeder himself later brings forward a modification of his own previous opinion, though he does not explain the reasons for his change of heart. This is what he says: "Shakespeare lui inspire

¹ J. J. Jusserand, *Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1898), p. 173.

² Joseph Texte, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire* (Paris, 1895), p. 54.

³ E. Faguet, "Shakespeare," *Propos de théâtre* (Paris, 1903), p. 67.

⁴ F. Baldensperger, "Esquisse d'une histoire de Shakespeare en France," *Etudes d'histoire littéraire* (2^e série, 1910), pp. 159-60.

⁵ V. Schroeder, *L'Abbé Prévost, sa vie, ses romans* (Paris, 1898), p. 44.

[à Prévost], comme à Voltaire, une antipathie mêlée d'admiration. Il s'incline devant la vigueur de ses peintures, la saisissante beauté de ses sujets, il comprend même la philosophie profonde qui anime ses drames, il concède qu'ils font penser, mais les intrigues touffues, mais le mélange presque constant du tragique et du comique devaient le choquer et le déconcerter."¹ These differences of opinion make desirable a somewhat detailed examination of the works of Prévost himself.

Seventeen hundred and thirty-one is the year and the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*² the book in which for the first time Prévost speaks of Shakespeare. There he gives expression to an admiration which is rather keen but quite general and lacking in definiteness. He says:

J'ai vu plusieurs de leurs pièces de théâtre qui m'ont paru ne le céder ni aux grecques ni aux françaises. J'ose dire même qu'elles les surpasseroient, si leurs poètes y mettoient plus de régularité;³ mais pour la beauté des sentimens, soit tendres, soit sublimes; pour cette force tragique qui remue le fond du cœur, et qui excite infailliblement les passions dans l'âme la plus endormie; pour l'énergie des expressions, et l'art de conduire les événemens, ou de ménager les situations, je n'ai rien lu, ni en grec ni en français qui l'emporte sur le théâtre d'Angleterre. Le *Hamlet* de Shakespeare, le *Don Sébastien* de Dryden, l'*Orphan* et la *Conspiration de Venise* d'Otway, plusieurs pièces de Congreve, de Farquhar, etc., sont des tragédies admirables, où l'on trouve mille beautés réunies. Quelques-unes sont un peu défigurées par un mélange de bouffonneries indignes du cothurne; mais c'est un défaut que les Anglois ont reconnu eux-mêmes, et dont ils ont commencé à se corriger.⁴

These are the words of the mentor of the young marquis in the *Mémoires*; there is no reason why the passage should not be accepted as an expression of the first impressions received by Prévost himself during his stay in England. The beauty and the tragic force of the English drama have struck him forcefully. Like most French travelers of the period, he is impressed with the vigor of the English

¹ V. Schroeder, "L'Abbé Prévost journaliste," *Revue du XVIII^e siècle* (1914), pp. 136-37.

² Vols. I-IV in 1728, Vols. V-VII in 1731.

³ The same criticism and the same praise appear seven years later in Louis Riccoboni, *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les différens théâtres de l'Europe* (1738, Amsterdam, 1740), p. 139.

⁴ *Œuvres choisies de l'Abbé Prévost* (Paris, 1810-16, 39 vols.), II, 281.

language. English tragedy moves him to the "fond du cœur," and it rouses "infailliblement les passions dans l'âme la plus endormie." We know from Prévost's other work how impressionable he was. It is at this same period that he was writing the novels that drew forth "torrents of tears" from Mlle Aïssé and from Jean-Jacques; soon, with his translations of Richardson, he was rousing the emotions of all the "âmes sensibles" of France. Nevertheless Prévost finds "bouffonneries" in Shakespeare. Fortunately the English themselves have already perceived them and have even begun to correct them. This last observation comes frequently from the Abbé's pen. It is very significant as evidence of the fact that his taste remains to a great degree French in quality and has been anglicized much less than has often been thought. Let us not, therefore, fail to note that from the very beginning his enthusiasm is somewhat restrained. Still, in spite of its lack of definiteness, the general tone of the passage is sufficiently favorable to permit M. Jusserand to call Prévost "un vrai *anglomane* et . . . un des premiers en date."¹ If the Abbé had written only the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, we might accept M. Jusserand's words as forming an accurate summing up of the Abbé Prévost's general attitude toward English literature and toward Shakespeare. Since, however, the Abbé is also the author of a weekly magazine, the *Pour et Contre*, which appeared from 1733 to 1740, we must look there likewise for his literary opinions, and we must examine them in more detail.

The magic spell cast over Prévost by his first stay in England (1728-30) seems to have lost its power in 1733, for the Abbé wrote in the *Pour et Contre* a passage as severe as the one in the *Mémoires* had been favorable:

Le théâtre n'a point encore secoué le joug de la férocité. C'est d'elle qu'un Sophocle ou qu'un Euripide anglois² emprunte les idées du sublime. Quelles idées, grands Dieux! et qu'elles choquent la sage nature! Les tragédies sont ici dénuées de mœurs et de caractères. C'est une histoire de trente ou de quarante années, histoire plus fabuleuse souvent que celles de nos vieux romanciers; mais en revanche les héroïnes de la pièce sont folles,

¹ Jusserand, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

² This is directed at Shakespeare. In 1700 Boyer's *Grammar* had said: "Nous avons . . . un Sophocle et un Euripide en Shakespeare."—Jusserand, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

et presque tous les héros se donnent la mort. Qu'on ajoute à cela quelques apparitions d'esprits, une pompe funèbre et un récit de bataille, voilà une tragédie anglaise qui sera louée sans aucun ménagement.¹ Les comédies anglaises sont plus estimables. Une variété presque infinie de caractères leur donne un air d'élégance et de vivacité qui plaît aux connoisseurs; je voudrois seulement qu'on les dépouillât de ces plaisanteries basses et de ces expressions grossières qui ne devraient plaire qu'à la plus vile populace.²

It is to be noted that this harsh estimate is not softened, as far as tragedy is concerned, by a single qualification. It is hard to find the cause for these bitter criticisms. They may perhaps be due to the cold welcome Prévost received in England on the occasion of his second journey,³ although this hypothesis does not accord with the scrupulous sense of justice we find to be generally characteristic of the Abbé. However, he may well have fallen here below his usual level. A more acceptable explanation, though this too is not wholly satisfactory, may be found in the possible influence of the *Lettres philosophiques* of Voltaire, which Prévost had seen in manuscript and which he had in his possession, as he tells us, "pendant quelque tems" before September, 1733.⁴ Can this "quelque tems" go back as far as the beginning of July, when these criticisms of the English drama appeared in the third number of the *Pour et Contre*? It is not at all impossible. Voltaire likewise had given the preference to English comedy over English tragedy, though even his criticism of the latter was not as sweepingly bitter and unfavorable as Prévost's is here. Ordinarily, while Prévost admired very much some of Voltaire's work, he did not let himself be overawed by his prestige. If such influence is to be admitted here, we must grant also that Prévost soon freed himself from it. It is quite possible that this severe judgment is due to the recent reading of some English play which gave Prévost a particularly unfavorable impression. Could this play have been *Hamlet* itself?⁵ In any case, these various hypotheses are nothing more than possible explanations which are in no way certain. The criticism is much more severe than we should have expected from Prévost's pen.

¹ Is Prévost attacking *Hamlet*? These details at least suggest such a possibility.

² *PC*, I, 71-72.

³ V. Schroeder, *l'Abbé Prévost, sa vie, ses romans* (Paris, 1898), p. 63 and n. 1.

⁴ *PC*, I, 242.

⁵ See footnote 2.

It is not long before we again find Shakespeare treated by the author of the *Pour et Contre*. This time it is apropos of the Abbé's review of Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*. Prévost's articles appeared during the last half of September and the first half of October, 1733,¹ about a month after the English edition of the *Lettres*² and six months before the first French edition.³ The very complete résumé given by Prévost probably constitutes, therefore, a sort of first French appearance of this important work.⁴ Here Prévost shows himself much more favorable to Shakespeare. "Il ne paroît dans ses ouvrages ni goût ni connoissance des règles; mais il s'y trouve par tout des étincelles du plus beau feu du monde. C'étoit une imagination naturellement sublime, qui n'ayant point d'autre guide qu'elle-même, s'est égarée souvent dans sa route."⁵ This is a paraphrase of Voltaire, but it is significant that Prévost softens the expression as it is given in the English edition—"not so much as a single spark of good taste." "Elle est outrée," says Prévost, "et elle a choqué ici bien des gens."⁶ Some other slight changes show the same tendencies and seem to express a prudent admiration, greatly tempered by the conviction that Shakespeare would have gained much by being more "regular." Prévost, we notice, maintains that he expressed only the opinion "éclairée" of the English themselves at this period, ordinarily ready enough to admit that Shakespeare contained "saillies déréglées et de bizarres imaginations," and that taste had progressed far since his time. For the most extreme and uncompromising expression of this opinion one has only to adduce Rymer,⁷ who was not surpassed in unfavorable criticism by Voltaire, and who furnished Voltaire

¹ The second of these two articles is followed by: "Lu et approuvé, ce 22. Septembre 1733, Signé, Souchay."—*PC*, I, 288.

² G. Lanson, *les Lettres philosophiques de Voltaire* (critical edition, Paris, 1909), I, xl.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ At least Prévost's review is the first in French mentioned by M. Lanson (*op. cit.*, I, xlv).

⁵ *PC*, I, 278-79.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 278, n. b.

⁷ Thomas Rymer (1641-1713), historiographer royal (1692-1713), compiler of the important collection of historical documents, the *Fœdera*, author of a translation of Rapin's *Réflexions sur Aristote* (1674), of the *Tragedies of the Last Age Considered* (1678), and of the *Short View of Tragedy* (1693). Ridiculous as he frequently appears to us now because of his exaggerated respect for the rules, he was in his time a critic of much importance.

himself with many a suggestive vituperation, which the latter was glad in his turn to use against the English dramatist. Perhaps even yet too little emphasis has been placed upon the fact that, if the French of the period were generally inclined to find in Shakespeare faults rather than beauties, they had more than sufficient precedent in the attitude of many English critics highly esteemed in their day.

Prévost corrects Voltaire's verse translation of the *Hamlet* monologue by a prose translation much closer to the original¹ and not surpassed by the translations made later by Le Tourneur and in the nineteenth century by Hugo fils.² Some thirty years later than Prévost's translation Voltaire somewhat unwillingly published a literal version³ better than the Abbé's and in fact very remarkable for its accuracy and vigor.

In this review of Voltaire's *Lettres* Prévost distinguishes himself by the moderation of his criticisms on Shakespeare. He even quotes the favorable part of Shaftesbury's estimate of *Hamlet* and omits the rather unfavorable criticism which this author had expressed on the preceding page.⁴ However, we must needs be careful not to number the Abbé too quickly with the enthusiastic admirers of Shakespeare. It is well to recall the fact that by differing discreetly from Voltaire's opinion and by correcting it in some particulars Prévost was able to give himself an attractive rôle. His corrections are accurate, nevertheless, and in any case possess, therefore, a very real merit.

The English dramatist is mentioned by Prévost in Volume V of the *Pour et Contre* (1734) as the author of the tragedy of *Richard III* and of *Othello*, "autre pièce célèbre du même poète."⁵ Some remarks on the character of Richard III and of Iago are merely translations from the *Grub Street Journal* and consequently cannot be taken as the opinion of Prévost himself. Later the Abbé translates the flute

¹ Soon after Prévost's articles the *Bibliothèque britannique* also published a literal translation, criticizing Voltaire's version as follows: "Voilà à peu près ce que dit Shakespeare; voici ce que Mr. de Voltaire lui fait dire."—II, 124.

² Cf. Mary Gertrude Cushing, *Pierre Le Tourneur* (New York, 1908), pp. 232–35.

³ Published in the *Appel à toutes les nations* of 1761 and incorrectly added to the *Lettres philosophiques* in the posthumous Kehl edition (1784–89). Cf. G. Lanson, *op. cit.*, II, 82, note to l. 97.

⁴ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks* (4th ed., Dublin, 1737–43), "Advice to an Author," pp. 275–76.

⁵ *PC*, V, 304, nn. a and b.

scene which occurs between Hamlet and Guildenstern (Act III, scene 2), and he adds:

Ce dialogue a paru d'une invention et d'un sens admirable à M. Addison. On l'a regardé de même après lui. Depuis peu, quelques critiques, moins esclaves de leur respect pour M. Addison, ont osé condamner ce qu'il a loué, et sont parvenus par le ridicule qu'ils ont jeté sur les raisonnemens de Hamlet à les faire estimer leur juste prix. Il est vrai, disent-ils, que Hamlet passe dans une partie de la pièce pour un prince dont la raison est affoiblie; mais comme sa folie est feinte, il ne paroît fou que lorsqu'il le veut, et il ne veut point le paroître avec Guildenstern. D'ailleurs, ce seroit mal défendre le jugement de M. Addison que d'avoir recours à la folie de Hamlet pour le justifier.¹

It is interesting to note that as far as Prévost was concerned there was no debate as to whether Hamlet's madness was real or feigned. He unhesitatingly accepted the latter theory.

Most of the passage just cited is given as the opinion of English critics. However, by the phrase "sont parvenus à les faire estimer leur juste prix," Prévost frankly approves of their judgment, which is sufficiently unfavorable both to Addison and to Shakespeare. The passage shows that "Anglomaniya" has dwindled remarkably since the days of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*. Still these criticisms are directed at a rather minor detail, and we remember that already in the *Mémoires* Prévost was severe enough with regard to the "bouffonneries."

In Volume IV of the *Pour et Contre* mention is made of Milton, Shakespeare, Shaftesbury, and Nassau, who are called "ces quatre grands hommes."² In the following volume we find this interesting remark: "Nous conviendrons que Corneille est plus régulier que Shakespeare, sans avouer qu'il soit supérieur à lui, parce qu'il est certain que Shakespeare regagne par la force ce qu'il perd du côté de l'exactitude."³ At first sight one would naturally take this passage for a favorable appreciation by Prévost and for a proof of a most praiseworthy breadth of view. In reality we find ourselves dealing with something which is of frequent occurrence in the *Pour et Contre* and against which it is necessary to be ever on guard. All this part of his periodical is, in Prévost's words, merely "un mélange traduit

¹ *Ibid.*, IX, 115-18.

² *Ibid.*, IV, 253.

³ *Ibid.*, V, 88-89.

de l'anglois" and put in the mouth of the "avocat du Temple Bar," who figured for a brief time in the Abbé's magazine as a mouthpiece, after the manner of the *Spectator Papers*, of those Englishmen who were admirers of French literature as well as of their own.¹ Prévost states that the passage consists of "quelques observations littéraires d'un Anglois, ausquelles je ne changerai dans la traduction que ce qu'elles pourroient avoir d'offençant pour la France."² We may therefore conclude that the citation is perhaps in accord with Prévost's own thought, but we cannot be sure. Ordinarily in the eighteenth century Corneille was relegated by the French to a place in the second rank, below Racine and even below Voltaire. For the English, however, it was more natural to prefer Corneille, who had had so much influence upon the dramatic work of their own Dryden, and who was, in any case, much nearer the norm of English taste than the more classic Racine. This explains the fact that Prévost should have put the name of Corneille in the mouth of a representative of the English point of view. At any rate, we may admit as significant that Prévost was not scandalized by the preference given to the "force" of Shakespeare over the "exactitude" of Corneille; he tolerates the opinion at least, even if he does not go so far as to approve it openly.

We come now to Volume XIV of the *Pour et Contre*, where for the first time Prévost devotes much space to Shakespeare, and where he proposes to give a fairly complete idea of his life and works. Shakespeare is the subject of almost two whole numbers (CXCIV-CXCV), which appeared during the first part of January, 1738. M. Jusserand gives the following appreciation of their content:

Prévost . . . parle de lui [Shakespeare] avec une audace bien plus grande que Voltaire, mais qui attira beaucoup moins l'attention. Cet abbé était hérétique dans l'âme; il s'exprime sans respect sur les anciens et sur les règles; et il le fait, ce qui était alors sans exemple,³ au profit de l'auteur d'*Hamlet*. Shakespeare, dit-il, "n'a pas connu les anciens; tant mieux, car peut-être le contact lui aurait fait perdre quelque chose de cette chaleur, de cette impétuosité et de ce délire

¹ *PC*, V, 77.

² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³ Nevertheless, in the *Essai sur la poésie épique* of 1733, Voltaire had already said apropos of Shakespeare that the man of genius "laisse loin derrière lui tout ce qui n'est que raison et qu'exactitude."—*Œuvres* (Paris: Garnier, 1883), VIII, 318.

"*admirable*,¹ si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, qui éclate dans ses moindres "productions. Il n'observe pas les unités, mais en récompense, si l'on passe "aux mœurs, aux caractères, au ressort des passions et à l'expression des "sentiments, on ne trouvera presque rien, dans toutes ses œuvres, qui ne "puisse être justifié et, de toutes parts, il s'y présente des beautés auxquelles "on ne saurait accorder trop d'éloges."²

If we examine carefully the text of the *Pour et Contre*, it seems that M. Jusserand has exaggerated the boldness of the opinions Prévost held with regard to English literature in general and Shakespeare in particular. Prévost was not such a literary "heretic," nor was he so completely freed of respect for the ancients and their rules. The citations given by M. Jusserand are taken from the *Pour et Contre*, XIV, 27 and 33. It is upon these passages and upon the general tone of the matter included between pages 26 and 48 that he bases his conclusions. One important fact seems, however, to have been neglected by M. Jusserand, as it has been by M. Baldensperger also; namely, that the abundant and accurate details with regard to the life of Shakespeare, the very favorable judgments just cited and others like them, the information about the *Winter's Tale*,³ *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King John*, *Richard III*, *Henry VI*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and finally the comparison between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, all this is nothing but "la traduction de certains fragmens de l'histoire littéraire des Anglois."⁴ Thus we have here only the opinion of an English admirer of Shakespeare, and not the expression of Prévost's own opinions. In fact, after this long article on Shakespeare, Prévost is already thinking of bringing forward a "correction." He says:

Avant que de hasarder mes propres réflexions sur le caractère et le mérite de Shakespeare, je me rends aux instances de quelques amateurs du Parnasse anglois, qui brûlant de connoître ce poète célèbre autrement que par des observations générales sur sa personne et sur ses écrits, me pressent de publier le sujet de quelques-unes de ses meilleures pièces. Je ne regrète point le tems que ce dessein m'a fait mettre à les relire.⁵

¹ The italics are by M. Jusserand.

² Jusserand, *op. cit.*, p. 173; cf. *supra*, pp. 179-80.

³ M. Jusserand says (*op. cit.*, p. 173): "Prévost sait l'original des pièces de Shakespeare; il connaît la nouvelle de Greene utilisée dans le *Conte d'Hiver*." But the allusion to the "Delectable History of Dorastus and Faunia" (*PC*, XIV, 32) is also contained in the part translated from the English and in no way proves that Prévost knew more of it than its title.

⁴ *PC*, XIV, 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Prévost was entirely correct in calling No. CXCIV a translation from the English, for it is possible to locate the original source. In his study of Shakespeare, Prévost used Rowe's edition, probably the second, which appeared in 1714, and which the Abbé called "la plus répandue."¹ From this edition, or from the first of 1709-10, he obtained his information and the greater part of his opinions. It is this work which contains the "fragmens de l'histoire littéraire des Anglois," translated by the editor of the *Pour et Contre*, Prévost.

This edition offered three different sources of information with regard to Shakespeare: Rowe's² essay entitled "Some Account of the Life, etc., of Mr. William Shakespeare,"³ Gildon's⁴ "An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome, and England,"⁵ and finally his "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare."⁶ The first essay, the one written by Rowe, is the source of the "fragmens de l'histoire littéraire des Anglois," that is to say, the source of that number of the *Pour et Contre* so often invoked as proof of the breadth of view, even of the Anglomania, of Prévost. At the end of this same number a short passage (pp. 47-48) is indicated by Prévost himself as being taken from Gildon's first essay, though Prévost gives only the title and not the author's name.⁷ The "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare" were of great help to Prévost in the preparation of the following number.

In the first of the Shakespeare numbers Prévost followed Rowe very closely, omitting, however, some parts as uninteresting or too long and often changing the order of arrangement. The whole is intentionally and frankly a translation.⁸

We must then pass on to the following number of the *Pour et Contre* in order to find with certainty Prévost's own opinions with

¹ *PC*, XIV, 50.

² Nicolas Rowe (1674-1718), English dramatist, author of the *Fair Penitent*, *Jane Shore*, etc., and editor of the *Works* of Shakespeare (1709-10).

³ Nicolas Rowe, *Shakespeare's Works* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1709), I, i-xi.

⁴ Charles Gildon (1665-1724), an English writer little known today. He was attacked by Pope in the *Dunciad*, somewhat unjustly, as it seems.

⁵ Rowe, *op. cit.*, VII (Curlil, 1710), i-lxvii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 257-444.

⁷ *PC*, XIV, 47, n. a, "Essay, on the Art, rise, and progiess of the stagie." The French printer did not yet know his English very well.

⁸ Cf., for instance, Rowe, pp. ii-iii, with *PC*, XIV, 26.

regard to Shakespeare.¹ However—one is surprised to discover it—even the plot analyses are not by Prévost. Once more he adopts the easier method of translation, but this time without indicating the fact. By the sentence, “je ne regrète point le tems que ce dessein m’a fait mettre à les relire,”² he even seems to give intentionally a false impression.

The source used in this case is Gildon’s second essay, the “Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare.” Prévost begins with *The Tempest*, the analysis of whose plot he translates from Gildon. He tells us that it is “l’une des plus célèbres” of Shakespeare’s plays, and then continues:

Les Anglois ont trouvé peu de défauts dans cette pièce. Ils prétendent même que les règles essentielles y sont observées; et que pour ce qui regarde les caractères et le stile, il n’y a point de juste reproche à faire à l’auteur. Je traduirai quelque jour la scène du Prince de Naples et de Miranda, qui est remarquable en effet par mille traits dignes de la réputation de Shakespeare. Mais j’ose dire que malgré ces étincelles de goût et de génie,³ qui rachètent bien des grossièretés, la *Tempête* passeroit sur notre théâtre pour une pièce ridicule.⁴

Prévost passes off the opinion of a single English critic for that of the nation in general and seems to wish us to think his knowledge of the state of English opinion greater than perhaps it was. Apparently the admiration expressed for the scene between the Prince of Naples and Miranda is really Prévost’s own. The last sentence of the criticism just cited as his final estimate of *The Tempest* is evidently the expression of his own feeling. It is probable enough that a French audience would scarcely have tolerated Caliban.

There follows a translation of an English apology for the use of magic in the play,⁵ but Prévost does not approve. We no longer see the enthusiastic “anglomane” who praises everything English without hesitation or distinction. There are “bien des grossièretés” and only “des étincelles de goût et de génie.”

¹ In this same number there are also “quelques remarques d’un des plus beaux esprits de Londres” (PC, XIV, 50), but this time it is not difficult, either by means of Prévost’s wording or by the quotation marks, to separate them from the opinions of the author of the *Pour et Contre*.

² PC, XIV, 49; cf. *supra*, p. 187.

³ Compare Voltaire (*Lettres phil.*, II, 79), “sans la moindre étincelle de bon goût.”

⁴ PC, XIV, 52–53.

⁵ Gildon, pp. 264–65.

Prévost, however, finds the *Merry Wives of Windsor*—*les Femmes de Windsor en bonne humeur*, as he translates it—more to his taste. The plot is recounted in detail, again after Gildon,¹ and Prévost continues: “Ajoutons, pour augmenter l'idée qu'on doit s'en former, que la reine Elizabeth en faisoit ses délices; que suivant le jugement de Dryden, le principal caractère est ce qu'on a jamais vu de plus parfait sur la scène comique; et que si l'on en croit le fameux duc de Buckingham, c'est un morceau qui sera toujours inimitable.”² This information with regard to Queen Elizabeth, Dryden, and the Duke of Buckingham was obtained by Prévost without unnecessary difficulty; the first item is to be found in Rowe's essay,³ from which the Abbé had already taken it for the preceding number of the *Pour et Contre*,⁴ and the two others in Gildon's “Remarks.”⁵

“Il y a deux intrigues dans cette pièce,” continues Prévost, “mais il faut confesser qu'elles sont jointes avec plus d'art et de vraisemblance que dans la plupart des pièces anglaises.”⁶ This is in no way original; it is a direct translation from the English.⁷ He says:

Les critiques anglois⁸ confessent, que cette comédie n'est pas absolument conforme aux règles et à la pratique des anciens. La durée est d'environ trois jours. L'action est double, et la scène, qui embrasse Windsor et les lieux voisins, ne répond pas mieux à la règle de l'unité. Mais ils prétendent que par la conduite de l'intrigue, l'agrément des situations, la force des caractères, et la finesse de la plaisanterie, elle l'emporte sur le théâtre ancien et moderne. . . . Qui ne regretteroit pas à la fin de cet article, qu'une comédie si vantée soit encore inconnue hors de l'Angleterre? Ne se trouvera-t-il personne qui mette le public en état d'en juger par une traduction? Je ne déclare pas mes desseins, quoiqu'ils ne soient pas éloignés de l'exécution; mais je puis dire d'avance qu'ayant lu plusieurs fois cette pièce célèbre, et l'ayant vu représenter par les plus fameux acteurs de Londres,⁹ j'ai tâché, dans la mesure bornée de mes lumières, d'en porter un jugement fidèle et désintéressé. Le voici en deux mots. En passant sur les défauts que j'ai

¹ Gildon, pp. 285–86.

² Page 290.

³ *PC*, XIV, 56.

⁴ *PC*, XIV, 56.

⁵ Rowe, *op. cit.*, pp. viii–ix.

⁷ Gildon, p. 285.

⁶ *PC*, XIV, 37–38.

⁸ Always the same tendency to pass off the opinion of a single English critic for that of the nation at large.

⁹ Genest, *History of the Drama and Stage in England* (1832), shows that the *Merry Wives* was played several times in London during the time that Prévost was there.

remarqués et que les Anglois sensés sont les premiers à reconnoître,¹ il m'a semblé, en effet, que l'invention, la conduite, et les caractères, méritoient les applaudissements qu'ils ont reçus. Mais ce n'est qu'après un long usage des mœurs et du goût de la nation, que j'ai commencé à juger si favorablement. De sorte que sans ce secours, j'aurois été plus choqué de cent idées du poète, qui m'auroient paru grossières et ridicules, suivant la manière de penser dans laquelle j'ai été élevé, que je n'aurois été frappé des traits de force et de lumière qui percent au travers de cette ténébreuse écorce. Si l'on m'objecte que les mœurs et les usages du tems de Plaute et de Térence n'étoient pas moins différens des nôtres et que nous ne laissons pas d'être tout d'un coup sensibles aux beautés que nous découvrons dans leurs pièces, je réponds que non seulement l'étude nous accoutume dès notre jeunesse aux mœurs et aux usages des Romains, mais qu'il y a réellement plus de différence, et j'ose dire plus d'opposition, entre les usages de Londres et de Paris, qu'on ne peut s'en figurer entre ceux de Paris et de l'ancienne Rome: d'où je conclus que la meilleure traduction des *Merry Wives of Windsor*, du moins si elle est littérale, ne fera jamais convenir nos François de l'excellence de cette pièce, et bien moins de la supériorité que les Anglois en prennent droit d'attribuer à leur théâtre.²

There is much more originality in this piece of literary criticism than in the preceding. Prévost likes the play, for he has seen it given by "les plus fameux acteurs de Londres," and besides he has read it "plusieurs fois." His intention of giving "un jugement fidèle et désintéressé" is evidently sincere and well carried out in this remarkable example of independent and unprejudiced criticism. The esteem which he here shows for English drama has been developed slowly after "un long usage des mœurs et du goût de la nation" and is not the result of a first rapid impression. Persistent efforts to understand the character and manners of the English people form the basis of his judgments, which are inspired by a clear perception of the relativity of all things in matters of taste. It is not without reason that Prévost observes that Paris is nearer the culture of ancient Rome than it is to that of eighteenth-century London.

Nevertheless we must not fail to notice how general and vague Prévost's appreciations remain. "Des traits de force et de lumière qui percent au travers de cette ténébreuse écorce"; what does this mean after all? It is an easy way of expressing appreciation without justifying it in any definite manner. Gildon had indicated the

¹ Cf. *supra*, p. 180.

² *PC*, XIV, 61-64.

particular scenes which pleased him. Voltaire had done the same in his remarks apropos of *Julius Caesar*.¹ One is struck by the complacency with which Prévost insists again upon the idea that "les Anglois sensés" join with the French in recognizing and in condemning many faults in Shakespeare.

Prévost next examines *Othello*, "une tragédie que les Anglois ne changeroient pas avec nous contre la meilleure pièce de Corneille ou de Racine."² The narrative of the plot differs from that of Gildon in one important detail. The English original reads simply: "But the Moor effectually put his revenge in execution on his wife."³ Prévost shows a certain familiarity with the play and also rather pronounced traces of French taste when he lengthens the narrative as follows: "Le More, à qui il ne reste plus aucun doute de l'infidélité de sa femme, depuis qu'on lui a persuadé qu'elle a fait présent à Roderigo d'un précieux mouchoir qu'elle avoit reçu de lui, exécute cruellement sa vengeance à la vue des spectateurs, en l'étranglant dans son lit."⁴ The phrase "à la vue des spectateurs" implies, it seems, disapproval; at least one can admit that Prévost, more accustomed to the *récits* of the French stage, was astonished at the bolder methods of the English theater; he is still but little "anglicisé," and remains at heart quite thoroughly French.⁵

The Abbé continues:

M. Rymer,⁶ le moins indulgent de tous les critiques qui ont fait le procès à Shakespeare, ne paroît pas si prévenu en faveur de cette pièce qu'Addisson et le commun des Anglois. Il accuse sans façon l'auteur d'avoir manqué de jugement dans le choix qu'il a fait d'un nègre pour son héros. Il n'y a personne, dit-il, qui ne traite de supposition monstrueuse l'amour d'une jolie femme pour un objet moins capable de l'attendrir que de l'épouvanter; et loin de s'intéresser au succès d'un si étrange mariage, on ne peut se défendre d'autant d'horreur que de dégoût. D'autres ont prétendu que cet aveugle amour n'est pas sans exemple, et qu'il suffit qu'il soit possible, pour justifier

¹ "Avec quel ravissement je voyais Brutus, tenant encore un poignard teint du sang de César, assembler le peuple romain, et lui parler ainsi du haut de la tribune aux harangues!"—Voltaire, *Œuvres*, II (1731), 316–18.

² *PC*, XIV, 64.

³ Gildon, p. 409.

⁴ *PC*, XIV, 65–66.

⁵ Is Prévost concealing his real thoughts in order to seem more in accord with his French readers than he actually is? This is a possible hypothesis and one very dear to Mr. F. B. Bury (cf. "The Abbé Prévost in England," *Scottish Review* [1899], pp. 27–52). However, in favor of this hypothesis we have no conclusive proof, and can admit its possibility only with reserve. Cf. *infra*.

⁶ Cf. *supra*, p. 183, note 7.

le poète. On conçoit, disent-ils, qu'une jeune fille qui n'a jamais vu le monde et que l'habitude continuelle de voir un More a guérie de l'aversion naturelle qu'on a pour des visages de cette couleur, peut se laisser toucher par les soins et les belles actions d'un gallant homme sans aucun égard pour ce qui le défigure aux yeux des autres. . . .

Quand cette apologie seroit beaucoup plus forte, il me semble, comme à M. Rymer, que ce qui suffiroit pour justifier Desdemona, ou pour donner de la vraisemblance à sa passion, ne disculperoit pas Shakespeare. Il est aisé d'en sentir la raison. Je pense aussi avec le même critique, que le fameux mouchoir d'Othello est une preuve trop foible pour servir de fondement au cruel excès de sa jalousie, et je ne puis trouver autant de force et de beauté que M. Addison dans une scène où les mouvemens les plus furieux de ce mari jaloux portent sur une cause si légère.¹ Le caractère de Iago peut être plus aisément défendu. Je ne sçais sur quel principe M. Rymer prétend qu'un traître n'est point un personnage qui puisse être souffert sur la scène. La véritable vertu, dont il dit que le théâtre doit toujours être une école, suppose la connoissance et la haine du vice; l'une ne peut s'acquérir, et l'autre se fortifier, que par des exemples.² D'ailleurs, il faudroit bannir, par la même règle, l'amour, l'ambition, la colère, etc., avec tous leurs effets, tels que l'effusion du sang, le meurtre, etc. Comment se figurer que la vertu puisse être représentée sans obstacles? Et quels obstacles trouve-t-elle plus ordinairement que ceux du vice?

Il en est de la critique d'*Othello* comme de celle du *Cid*.³ Toute juste qu'on la trouve, elle n'a jamais empêché les Anglois de courir en foule à toutes les représentations de cette pièce, et de la regarder comme un des plus beaux ouvrages de Shakespeare.⁴

Elle cède néanmoins le rang dans leur estime à la tragédie de *Hamlet* qu'ils s'accordent tous à nommer le chef-d'œuvre du Prince de leur théâtre.⁵

In his objection to *Othello*'s color Prévost is completely in accord with Gildon, who says: "I have drawn the fable with as much favour to the author as I possibly cou'd, yet I must own that the faults found in it by Mr. Rymer are but too visible for the most part. That of making a negro of the hero or chief character of the play, wou'd shock any one."⁶ Gildon continues the discussion in the same tone

¹ Cf. Thomas Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy* (J. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, New York and Oxford, 1908).

² Cf. Prévost's defense of his own *Manon Lescaut*. He there takes the same position as here (*PC*, III, 137-39).

³ La Bruyère (*Des ouvrages de l'esprit*, par. 30) had spoken in the same manner of the triumph of the *Cid* over hostile critics. Du Bos had observed likewise: "Ceux qui ont lu la critique du *Cid*, n'en ont pas moins de plaisir à voir cette tragédie."—*Réflexions sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719; ed. of 1755), I, 306 and 309.

⁴ *PC*, XIV, 66-68.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁶ Gildon, p. 410.

as Prévost. It is probable that this whole question was very familiar to Prévost from discussions which he must have frequently heard from Englishmen and French refugees of his acquaintance. The allusions to Addison seem to be made by Prévost on his own account; they are not found in Gildon. It is to be noted that Prévost in this criticism leans toward the views of the English critic who was most unfavorable to Shakespeare, namely Rymer. Later in the century the "bonhomme" Ducis also objected to the color of Othello and lightened it by several shades.¹ Prévost does not consider the "mouchoir" as too "familiar," and that fact is indicative of a certain breadth of view when we remember the blame heaped upon Hugo a hundred years later for his temerity in using the word on the stage; however, Prévost does think that the handkerchief constitutes too slight a cause to justify the mad jealousy of Othello. In this matter he differs from Gildon, who was willing to admit that "jealousie is born often of very slight occasions, especially in the breasts of men of those warmer climates."²

In short, Prévost does not say positively that he approves of the English admiration for *Othello*, but it seems that the sentence near the end of his remarks is equivalent to a defense of the play. All of these criticisms, in his opinion, are after all without effect upon the public. In the case of *Othello* as in that of the *Cid*, the crowd rejects the opinions of those literary men who see only faults; it admires the genius which is superior to the rules, and it overlooks the "faults" in favor of the beauties.³

It would seem that in *Hamlet* we should have the climax of Prévost's literary criticism. This is in no way the case. As before the Abbé resumes the plot, but he gives this short addition to Gildon: "Les fossoyeurs chantent, en remuant des os et des têtes de morts. Hamlet entre dans une conversation fort singulière avec eux."⁴ This illuminating sentence offers us nothing which is not to be found

¹ On Ducis consult E. Preston Dargan, "Shakespeare and Ducis," *Modern Philology*, X (1912-13), 137-78.

² Gildon, p. 411.

³ Du Bos gives to the "sentiment" of the crowd "cultivée" the final judgment in cases of this sort and refuses to grant final authority either to the professional critics or to the rules.

⁴ *PC*, XIV, 72.

previously in Voltaire,¹ and about the same time, or later, in Riccoboni,² D'Argens,³ or Le Blanc.⁴ This scene did then impress unfavorably all the most important French critics who at that time discussed Shakespeare's plays. Gildon also objects to it, but only because he thinks it out of place in a tragedy, and not, like some of the French critics, because he thinks it ridiculous in itself.⁵

Prévost continues: "Cette étrange rapsodie, où l'on n'aperçoit ni ordre ni vraisemblance, et où le comique et le tragique sont confusément mêlés,⁶ passe pour le chef-d'œuvre de Shakespeare. On ne m'en croiroit pas, si je ne promettois d'expliquer dans quelque autre feuille les causes de cette admiration."⁷ Unfortunately this explanation never appeared.⁸ It seems that we are almost forced to admit that Prévost had lost the admiration for *Hamlet* expressed in the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*. Perhaps, at the time when he wrote the *Mémoires*, he had not read the play for himself, and was praising it solely on its reputation; but this scarcely seems probable. It is possible that in the *Pour et Contre* he wished simply to forestall the objections which he could well expect his readers to make; by promising to refute their criticisms in a later number he expected, it may be, to pique their curiosity the more. Perhaps the difference between the Abbé's earlier opinion and his later attitude is sufficiently explained by the difference in age; the Prévost of forty has his enthusiasm less easily awakened than the Prévost of thirty. Without more evidence than we have it is impossible to find the solution of the problem.

¹ *Lettres phil.*, II, 80.

² *Réflexions . . . sur les différens théâtres de l'Europe* (1738; Amsterdam, 1740), p. 128.

³ *Lettres juives*, IV (1738), 237.

⁴ *Lettres d'un François*, II (1745), 298.

⁵ Gildon, p. 404.

⁶ Prévost, like his fellow-countrymen, was shocked at the romantic mingling of tragic and comic elements. Likewise Gildon (*loc. cit.*, and in the *Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage*, p. ix). Cf. also Paul Hamelius, *Die Kritik in der englischen Literatur des 17ten und 18ten Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1897), pp. 56-57.

⁷ *PC*, XIV, 72.

⁸ At the beginning of this same number (*PC*, XIV, 49; cf. *supra*, p. 187) Prévost had spoken of his intention to "hasarder ses propres réflexions sur le caractère et le mérite de Shakespeare." Was he then later afraid to put his plan into execution? Cf. *supra*, p. 192, note 5, for Mr. Bury's opinion that Prévost was not sincere in the *Pour et Contre*. But why consider that he was more sincere elsewhere, unless we have positive proof of some sort, or at least evidence?

The originality of Prévost in this criticism on Shakespeare, enthusiastically praised as it has been, seems to us of the slightest. In one whole number the Abbé openly limits himself to giving only the *English* point of view—and this, once it is examined, proves to be almost wholly that of Rowe; in the second number he is almost always very near to Gildon in thought if not in language. On *Hamlet* the Abbé has nothing of value, and the little he does say is entirely in the spirit of his contemporaries, Voltaire included. *The Tempest* does not please him. *Othello* is criticized in the conventional manner, although Prévost does go so far as to admit that the play was successful in spite of the rules, comparing it in this regard with the *Cid*; this perhaps is a discreet suggestion of a liking for *Othello*, but we cannot be sure. In any case, Prévost figures as but a timid advocate rather than as an "Anglomaniac" or as an enthusiastic "champion." Only the *Merry Wives*¹ seems to evoke a really personal admiration, but even that is expressed in the vaguest and most general terms.

Prévost's position is midway between that of the more enthusiastic among the English and that of the hostile French. In all essential matters he is not far from the feeling of Gildon, more reserved than Rowe. Gildon thought that "Shakespeare is indeed stor'd with a great many beauties, but they are in a heap of rubbish."² Prévost appears sometimes timid and hesitating in his opinions. Those which he acknowledges as his own show that he was much less bold, much less in advance of the spirit of his time, than has been thought. He remains, in short, very much an eighteenth-century Frenchman in his taste, very much a classicist.³ Occasionally, however, this classicism seems to tend cautiously toward greater liberality of viewpoint.

¹ This is surprising, since the *Merry Wives* is scarce the type of play one would expect Prévost to enjoy by preference. Why did he not put the basket scene among the "bouffonneries"?

² Gildon, *Remarks*, p. 425.

³ Jacob Staab merely follows the tradition when he speaks of the "anglophile Leitung" of the Abbé Prévost (*Das Journal Etranger unter dem Abbé Prévost* [Strasburg, 1912], p. 2). Moreover, he does not take account of the fact that Prévost, by his attitude, shows that he is generally of the opinion that "la raison et le bon goût" are on the side of the French (*ibid.*, p. 17). He brings forward nothing to change our opinion that Prévost was little in advance of the French critics of his time. In speaking of Pope—and this is noteworthy—Prévost is more enthusiastic than when he is discussing Shakespeare. This is especially

It seems that, either from the limitations of his taste or from timidity in the face of French opinion, Prévost did not dare to embrace the cause of the English poet too ardently, but contented himself with a moderation in general friendly but rather cool. It is possible that he did share to a greater extent than he admits the more favorable English attitude, but that he found French hostility too strong to oppose it more vigorously, especially after the cooling of the ardor of Voltaire, who more and more was directing his powerful influence in a direction contrary to Shakespeare. Voltaire—and this is not surprising—was more decided than Prévost, both in his first enthusiasm and in his later hostility.¹ Only the *Mémoires*, a production of Prévost's youth and of the period of exile, seems to give evidence of a moment of enthusiasm on his part. His other judgments are, for the most part, just and moderate but rather lukewarm. The criticism is intelligent but, in spite of the paeans sung in its honor, seems quite unenthusiastic. We are certainly still far removed from the zealous championship of a Diderot, and nearer to a cool *arbiter elegantiarum*.

We can no longer, as formerly, look upon the Abbé Prévost as one of the first ardent champions of Shakespeare in France. One more legend, among so many that have grown up about his life and work,² has disappeared, and its disappearance carries along with it more regret than did the others. Less blindly anglicized, Prévost is, however, more cosmopolitan and reasonable, and his desire to be constantly just is much to his credit. The inadequateness of his information is to be explained by his journalistic work, which gave him little time for long preparation, and which forced him always to write rapidly in order to gain a living. We must not expect to find him a scholar. In spite of these facts he did choose as his sources of

the case also in his treatment of Lillo's *London Merchant*. Even to the end of his life the Abbé did not change his opinion of Shakespeare. The *Lettres de Mentor*, a posthumous work (1764), has this note: "Shakespeare, Otway, Lee, Addison, etc., n'ont pas une scène comparable dans sa totalité, par la force, aux belles scènes des grands tragiques françois."—*Œuvres*, XXXIV, 375, note.

¹ In illustration of this tendency we have already called attention to a part of Voltaire's criticism of *Julius Caesar* (cf. *supra*, p. 192, note 1, and p. 186, note 3). Let the reader turn again also to the *Discours sur la tragédie* published as a Preface to *Brutus* in 1731, and to the *Essai sur la poésie épique* of 1733. The *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) are already indicative of more hostile tendencies.

² See Henry Harris, *op. cit.*

information one enthusiastic English judgment and another which was average and moderate in tone; the over severe criticisms of Rymer did not meet with his approval, and, except for a detail or two, he passed them over in silence. The information given by Prévost—no less valuable because it was translated—and his moderation were of real service to the cause of Shakespeare in France.¹ Prévost invites the French to study a drama new to them. He tells them frankly that in it they will find many things to shock their ideas of good taste, but he also tells them that they will find, if they seek without prejudice, beauties worthy of their study. That certainly is the state of mind in which a foreign literature should always be approached. To have seen and called attention to that fact nearly a hundred years before Mme de Staël is not after all a slight merit.

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¹ It should be pointed out that by taking for the ideas of Prévost himself the section translated from Rowe, a contemporary of the Abbé set the example for modern critics. This contemporary is the Abbé Le Blanc. Cf. his *Lettres d'un François*, II (1745), 294-95. It is significant, at least for the history of his influence, that Prévost was so soon accorded the reputation of being excessively favorable to the English. The attribution was perhaps more justified than it is now possible for us to determine. However, Le Blanc saw in Prévost a dangerous rival who threatened the position he coveted for himself as a *connaisseur* of English literature. He was therefore not unwilling to find—perhaps even unjustly—a pretext for criticizing him.